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Quad 136



[◀ Previous](#) [Next ▶](#)

Wanna Build a Fitness Center?



When I was a faculty member, I remember my Division III student athletes telling me that they did better academically when they were in season. I was initially skeptical because I assumed the time commitment required by sports would naturally cut into study time. But after hearing this often enough, I came to believe that, as my students claimed, the discipline and time management that was required of student athletes might well lead to better academic performance. I had not, however, seen research that supported this idea empirically. A recent [study](#) of non-varsity athletes from Purdue University supports this hypotheses:

The more than 1,820 students who visit Purdue's France A. Córdoba Recreational Sports Center at least 16 times a month earned a GPA of 3.10 or higher.

The correlation between grades and gym use also is shown with moderate users. Students who used the gym at least seven times a month had an average GPA of 3.06.

The Purdue researcher summarized findings succinctly, “Being fit is good for the mind. It all ties together.”

While the researcher emphasized the fitness part of the story, I suspect that the discipline and time management are at least as important. If this conjecture is true, then musicians, students who volunteer and those in student government might also see a positive correlation between engagement outside the classroom and academic success in the classroom. Of course this relationship between extra-curricular engagement is probably not linear. If one were working full-time or had the time demands of a Division I athlete, I strongly suspect that academic performance would suffer. (Note: I would suggest there is an undergraduate senior thesis waiting to be written here.)

The Purdue research provides further support for the residential, liberal arts model—if one needed it.

It may be possible, however, to go a bit overboard when making the link between regular exercise and recreation facilities. In a [New York Times](#) article on the growth of water theme parks as part of aquatic recreation options at colleges and universities, the author notes:

Administrators also like to point to studies conducted at Purdue University and Michigan State, which have shown that students who hit the gym do better academically than those who don't. Floating down a river is not exactly a major calorie burn, but that's not the point.

Tempting as this option may be to draw students, I think our central Minnesota weather will provide the necessary discipline to resist any calls for such a project!

By the way, we are raising money to improve and expand our fitness center at Saint John's University. If anyone would like to help the academic performance of our students, please let me know.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | October 6th, 2014 | Categories: [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).